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“GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN” (Luke 2 14)

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Professor Adolf von Harnack in the *Sitzungsberichte* of the Berlin Academy for December 9, 1915 (pages 854–875) has discussed afresh in his characteristically interesting and instructive fashion the textual criticism and meaning of the angels’ song in Luke 2 14. After a full exposition of the evidence and an investigation of the rare word *εὐδοκία*, he decides for the following text:

Δόξα ἐν ὑψίστοις θεῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς
Εἰρήνη ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκίας,

which he translates:

“Glory in the highest to God and on earth
Peace to men of (His) gracious will.”

This form of the Greek text is in the second line substantially that on which the English Revised Version rests (“men in whom he is well pleased”); but Harnack, following Origen,¹ connects *εὐδοκίας* not with *ἀνθρώποις* but, by a somewhat harsh hyperbaton, with *εἰρήνη*, and interprets: “Peace is now given to men—no ordinary peace but *the peace of His gracious will*.”

Harnack’s argument, which contains much valuable discussion on various aspects of the verse, need not be here repeated. But two of the points which he makes, and in regard to which his reasoning is convincing, deserve notice; for although at first sight they might appear to occupy but a modest place among his results,

¹ Hom. 13 in Luc.; cf. Hort, “New Testament in Greek; Appendix,” p. 53; for the authentic Greek see Thenn in *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie*, 1891, p. 486.

in reality they seem to offer the key to the serious textual problem of the passage, and so lead to a translation and interpretation quite different from Harnack's. They may be stated thus:

(1) With the reading *εὐδοκίας*, the song is a distich, of which the first line must be taken to include the words *ἐπὶ γῆς* and the second to begin with *εἰρήνῃ*.

(2) *ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκίας* is a phrase wholly unexampled and in itself full of difficulty. For *εὐδοκία* means "God's gracious will." It refers to His purpose, His choice, not to His approval or satisfaction with man's performance; and it looks to the future, to grace, to the hope of a needy world, not to the past, to man's merit, or even to the inherent worth of human nature.

In spite of the latter of these two observations, Harnack, as already indicated, holds fast to the reading *εὐδοκίας* instead of *εὐδοκία*, and overcomes the difficulties in the manner explained above, by connecting this word with *εἰρήνῃ* and not with *ἀνθρώποις* at all. Now the resulting phrase *εἰρήνῃ εὐδοκίας* is not quite so unexampled as the other, but the order of words which it requires us to assume is so strange that this exegesis is highly unacceptable and to most will seem impossible.

Since then *εὐδοκίας*, however construed, leads us into the gravest difficulty, we are bound to reconsider the question of text. What is the evidence for this reading in preference to *εὐδοκία*? The bearing of the facts has been somewhat altered by new discovery since Dr. Hort wrote.

(a) *εὐδοκίας* is the reading of B*~~8~~*AD (C is lacking), Origen, and possibly Irenaeus, together with the whole body of Latin witnesses, and the Sahidic and Gothic.

(b) *εὐδοκία* is the reading of all other certain Greek witnesses, including apparently Theodotus as cited by Clement of Alexandria (*Excerpta ex Theodoto*, 31, 1; cf. 74, 1f.). It is further supported by all Syriac witnesses,

including Tatian's Diatessaron (as quoted in the Armenian Ephraim), Syr. Sin. (Syr. Cur. is lacking), Aphraates, and Ephraim, and by the Bohairic with some other versions.

It seems unquestionable that both readings were in existence in the second century. Other things being equal, the agreement of B, other Alexandrian witnesses, D, and the whole Latin text, might on general principles be held to outweigh in favor of *εὐδοκίας* the combined testimony of the Syriac, older and later, and of the younger Greek text, which doubtless had its earlier history in the same locality as the Syriac translations. But are other things equal? Are we left to external evidence?

Transcriptionally, *εὐδοκίας* is not a "hard" reading such as would have led an ancient editor to attempt an improvement. It is only hard for modern critical exegesis or for a scholar like Origen. Superficially everything is in order, as the consistent tradition of all Latin translations conclusively shows. Neither does *εὐδοκία*, on the other hand, seem to be a "hard" reading. Yet there is one important difference between the two, often overlooked, which is here significant. Given *εὐδοκία*, it is of course necessary to connect *ἐπὶ γῆς* with *εἰρήνῃ*, not with the preceding words. But, as Harnack shows, this connection with *εἰρήνῃ*, in itself considered, without regard to the construing of the following words, would be the less natural of the two possible connections. A Greek reader who did not already have in his mind the concluding words of the verse, would be almost sure, as he read, to get the sense, "Glory to God in heaven (*ἐν ὑψίστοις*) and on earth." He would proceed, "Peace among men." Then, when he reached *εὐδοκία* (if he found that reading in his text), he would be compelled either to go back and change his exegesis, or, going ahead, to improve his text. From this point of view, *εὐδοκία* is

seen to be distinctly the "harder," and therefore preferable, reading. That seems a sufficient motive for the change to *εὐδοκίας*, and it is the kind of motive of which an ancient editor would have felt the force. If *ἐν ὑψίστοις καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς* went together, *εὐδοκία* was impossible. The change to the genitive was a solution lying ready at hand.

We recognize here "the work of careful and leisurely hands," displaying "a delicate philological tact which unavoidably lends it at first sight a deceptive appearance of originality." In other words *εὐδοκίας* is the reading of an early revision of Hort's "Alexandrian" type, which in this case has influenced even Codex B, but from which the old text of Antioch was free.

But the improvement had an unforeseen consequence, which from another side betrays it as a textual corruption. With *εὐδοκία*, the verse is a tristich, and is easily translatable into three lines of formal poetry in either Hebrew or Aramaic. With *εὐδοκίας* it has become an irregular distich, far less adapted for retranslation into a Semitic tongue. Now that Luke i and ii are a translation from a Semitic original is supported by many lines of evidence, while the contrary explanation—that Luke's Hebraisms are due to familiarity with the Greek Old Testament—seems to be forbidden by the not infrequent cases in which unmistakable influence from an Old Testament passage combines with independence of the LXX. This has been well argued by C. C. Torrey, "The Translations Made from the Original Aramaic Gospels," in the *Studies in the History of Religions* presented to C. H. Toy, 1912. In such a document it is a sound canon that the more Semitic reading (here *εὐδοκία*) is to be preferred to the more Hellenistic.

We may then say that the proof of the antiquity of the reading *εὐδοκία* from Clement of Alexandria, the Diatessaron, and Syr. Sin., has neutralized the external

evidence on which Westcott and Hort relied, and that internal evidence speaks decidedly for the text:

Δόξα ἐν ὑψίστοις θεῷ,
 Καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρήνη.
 [Ἐν] ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκία.

The absence of *καὶ* with the last line is no blemish; for the first two lines are parallel and require to be connected, while the third bears its own distinct relation to the pair. It gives indeed the glad reason on which rests the preceding exultant pæan: God's gracious will has at last been given effect for mankind; *therefore* ampler Glory is now ascribed to God in heaven, and Salvation is the happy lot of earth.